

Driving Impaired... It's Just Not Worth It

By Dave Denniston
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The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reports that in 2009 there were 5,505,000 police reported motor vehicle traffic crashes in the United States. That's right 5 million times in 2009 alone we were reminded just how dangerous driving could be. In those crashes we lost 30,797 people and injured another 1,517,000. That means there were 11.01 deaths and 722 injuries for every 100,000 people in this country. I don't know about you, but those numbers should make you shutter just a little bit every time you get behind the steering wheel of a vehicle.

As emergency responders we increase the odds even more by adding lights, sirens and using specific exemptions as allowed to us by most state laws. We are allowed to exceed the speed limit, pass through controlled intersections and travel against traffic patterns. The downside however is that these exemptions greatly increase our odds of being in a collision. There are over 15,000 emergency vehicle accidents in the US each year and deaths while responding to and returning from alarms continues to be the second leading cause of line of duty deaths.

Studies also show us that in 2009, of the persons who were killed in traffic crashes, a staggering 32% died in alcohol impaired crashes. This number does not even consider the other accidents that involved drivers impaired from drugs, lack of sleep, age or physical impairments. Where would these numbers be if we considered all of those factors as well? The Unsafe Driving Acts study tells us that human factors contributed to 99.2% of motor vehicle accidents, environmental factors contributed in only 5.4% of the crashes and vehicle factors only contributed in .5% of those events. We always tend to blame something else, but the numbers show that 99.2% of the time, we are the ones to blame.

I remember that while at Cornell University my statistics class was at 11am. This was just before lunch and my biggest concern most days was what the sandwich of the day at The Big Red Barn was going to be. I do recall an interesting conversation in one class however about the term *causality*. It was defined as the relationship between an event (the cause) and a second event (the effect), where the second event is understood as a consequence of the first. I remember how those numbers could get pretty crazy in a hurry and thinking how the heck that information would ever be useful to me in the real world.

As I look at the numbers above I have to wonder if this is what causality was all about. Take a dangerous task (driving) add in a danger factor (emergency operations) and then add a second factor (driving impaired) and watch how these numbers spin out of control. I am sure someone that paid more attention in stats will contact me to dispute my theory here, but I think you can understand the point I am trying to make. The numbers do not look good if we drive an emergency vehicle with any type of impairment.

Before you get behind the wheel of an emergency vehicle with any type of impairment please ask yourself the following questions. What is the risk of driving this vehicle? Can I afford to lose my license or my job? Is this worth risking my life, my partner's life or a member of the general public's life? What happens to the original call if we fail to complete our mission because of my actions? What happens to my reputation and the reputation of my organization when we are involved in a crash because of my impairment? Am I ready to become just another number like all of those above?

So next time that alarm comes in right after you just had that beer with dinner, or took the cold medicine or you haven't slept in 24 hours, stop and think. Is what I am doing or about to do really worth it? We all joined this service because we want to help save lives and protect property. Are you willing to risk it all and possibly take a life or destroy property? **Driving Impaired – It's just not worth it.**

McNeil and Company has recently added a new course to our E Learning program on this topic. The course is called Driving Impaired – It's just not worth it. We encourage you to share this important program with your department. Please contact our Loss Control department at 1-800-822-3747 for more information. You can also email me at ddenniston@mcneilandcompany.com with any questions.

www.mcneilandcompany.com

This Month's Featured E-Learning Course

Driving Impaired

Impaired driving can be a huge problem for emergency service organizations. Driving the vehicles under normal conditions is challenging enough without the extra burden of being impaired.



Upcoming Events

Safe-D

Austin, TX

02/16/11 - 02/18/11

Fire Fighters, Rescue and EMS Mega Show

Uniondale, NY

02/26/11 - 02/27/11

PA EMS Western

Seven Springs, PA

03/25/11-03/26/11

FDIC

Indianapolis, IN

03/24/11-03/26/11